

A COMPARISON OF PASSIVE, ASSERTIVE, AND AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIORS

PASSIVE

You avoid saying what you want, think or feel. If you do, you say them in such a way that you put yourself down. Apologetic words with hidden meanings are frequent. A smoke screen of vague words or silence. "You know...", "Well...", "I mean...", "I guess", and "I'm sorry". You allow others to choose for you.

VERBAL BEHAVIORS

ASSERTIVE

You say what you honestly want, think, and feel in direct and helpful ways. You make your own choices. You communicate with tact and humor. You use "I" statements. Your words are clear and well chosen.

AGGRESSIVE

You say what you want, think, and feel, but at the expense of others. You use "loaded words" and "you" statements that label and blame. You are full of threats or accusations and apply one-upmanship.

PASSIVE

You use actions instead of words. You hope someone will guess what you want. You look as if you don't mean what you say. Your voice is weak, hesitant, and soft. You whisper in a monotone. Your eyes are to the side or downcast. You nod your head to almost anything anyone says. You sit and stand as far away as you can from the other person. You don't know what to do with your hands and they are trembling or clammy. You look uncomfortable, shuffle, and are tense or inhibited.

NON-VERBAL BEHAVIORS

ASSERTIVE

You listen closely. Your manner is calm and assured. You communicate caring and strength. Your voice is firm, warm, and expressive. You look directly at the other person, but you don't stare. You face the person. Your hands are relaxed. You hold your head erect and you lean toward the other person. You have a relaxed expression.

AGGRESSIVE

You make an exaggerated show of strength. You are flippant. You have an air of superiority. Your voice is tense, loud, cold or demanding. You are "deadly quiet." Your eyes are narrow, cold, and staring. You almost see through the other people. You take a macho fight stance. Your hands are on your hips and you are inches from the other people. Your hands are fists or your fingers are pointed at the other person. You are tense and angry appearing.

Your apparent goals and feelings:

PASSIVE

To please, to be liked

GOALS

ASSERTIVE

To communicate, to be respected.

AGGRESSIVE

To dominate or humiliate.

PASSIVE

You feel anxious, ignored, hurt, manipulated, and disappointed with yourself. You are often angry and resentful later.

FEELINGS

ASSERTIVE

You feel confident and successful. You feel good about yourself at that time and later. You feel in control, you have self-respect and you are goal oriented.

AGGRESSIVE

You feel self-righteous, controlling, and superior. Sometimes you feel embarrassed or selfish later.

Your apparent payoffs:

PASSIVE	ASSERTIVE	AGGRESSIVE
You avoid unpleasant situations, conflicts, short-term tensions, and confrontation. You don't have to take responsibility for your choices.	You feel good. You feel respected by others. Your self-confidence improves. You make your own choices. Your relationships with others are improved. You have very little physical distress now or later. You are in touch with your feelings.	You get some anger off your chest. You get a feeling of control. You feel superior.

The effects on others (they feel):

PASSIVE	ASSERTIVE	AGGRESSIVE
They feel guilty, superior, frustrated or even angry.	They feel respected or valued. They feel free to express themselves.	They feel humiliated, depreciated, or hurt.

Their feelings towards you:

PASSIVE	ASSERTIVE	AGGRESSIVE
They feel irritated. They pity and depreciate you. They feel frustrated and disgusted with you. They lose respect for you because you are a pushover and someone who does not know where he stands.	They usually respect, trust and value you. They know where you stand.	They feel hurt, defensive, humiliated, or angry. They resent, distrust and fear you. They may want revenge.

Probable outcome of each type of behavior:

PASSIVE	ASSERTIVE	AGGRESSIVE
You don't get what you want. If you do get your own way, it is indirect. You feel emotionally dishonest. Others achieve their goals at your expense. Your rights are violated. Your anger builds up and you either push it down or redirect it toward other people who are less powerful. You may find yourself procrastinating, suffering in silence, doing things half-heartedly, being sloppy, or becoming forgetful. You get maneuvered. Loneliness and isolation may become part of your life.	You often get what you want if it is reasonable. You often achieve your goals. You gain self-respect. You feel good. You convert win-lose to win-win. The outcome is determined by above-board negotiations. Your rights and other's rights are respected.	You often get what you want, but at the expense of others. You hurt others by making choices for them and infantilizing them. Others feel a right to "get even." You may have increasing difficulty with relaxing and "unwinding" later.

Adapted from a handout from the Center for Mindfulness, University of Massachusetts Medical School Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society, Worcester, MA.